

We have come to the last Sunday of the Church Year: the Sunday when we celebrate the Reign of Christ. It's an odd day. For a two reasons. First of all it's recent. It was only added to the Roman Catholic Calendar in 1925 and didn't make its way into Protestant churches until 1974. That means that for lots of us here this morning, it may well still have the feeling of novelty.

More importantly, it's liturgically redundant. For 2000 years, the Christian Church, East and West, has celebrated the Reign of Christ the King on Ascension Day. The day when the Lord, having risen from the dead, was, in his humanity, taken into the fullness of the presence of God the Father. We read a visionary prophecy of that event in our Old Testament lesson this morning. And I'll have more to say about it in a few minutes.

So the celebration is recent and redundant. Why bother? Well, it looks like the makers of the Lectionary which has, over the last 50 years, developed into the lectionary we use did it for straightforwardly ecumenical reasons. And that's fine. It's also good to have a Sunday dedicated to the Reign of Christ when Ascension Day always falls on a Thursday.

More than that, though, it is vital for us as disciples of Jesus to ask ourselves just how far Jesus's reign extends. And there is no better time to do that than as we wind up the church year, and once more walk through the story of Jesus from Advent to Pentecost, starting next week.

So with that in mind, let's ask the question. **King of Where?**

Jesus is King of Heaven

Let's begin with the Gospel. Jesus is standing in front of Pilate, the Roman Governor, the man who has the power to set him free or condemn him to death. At this point in their conversation, the question turns on just crime Jesus has been charged with. "Your people, your leaders, say you have committed treason by calling yourself a King. So are you a king?" Pilate is deeply troubled. He sees that Jesus is no revolutionary. He is looking for a reason to let Jesus go. He is trying—as all good politicians do (and that is not a dig!)—trying to find a compromise between polarized opinions. And it's complicated by the fact that the polarized positions are between Jews, and he, a Gentile, cares not a whit about it. He knows that the religious leaders are trying to draw him in with this charge of treason. He know's it bogus. He wants nothing to do with it. "Are you a king"

All Jesus had to say was no. I am no threat to Caesar. But he doesn't say that. Instead he says, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

What does that mean?

John's Gospel is a Gospel of Glory. It is a Gospel in which the Son of God displays the Glory of God in his miracles, in his discourses, and ultimately on the Cross. In the ultimate example of irony, it is when he is lifted up on the cross that he enters the Glory that was his from all eternity. Glory, further more, is a pretty specific biblical word. Glory is the presence of God made visible. When Jesus performs a sign (john's word for miracle), God is made visible. When he teaches, God is made visible. When he is brutally executed on a Roman Cross, he displays the Glory of God that will draw the whole world to himself.

It's on the cross in John that Jesus enters into his kingdom. His kingdom that is not of this world. It is on the cross that Jesus enters his glory. It is on and through the cross that Jesus enters heaven and—and this is key—brings with him all who belong to him.

So, if Jesus's kingdom is not of this world, we mean at least that he is the King of heaven. And that's actually good news for us. For all of us who have been united to him by the Holy Spirit in baptism are even now already reigning with him in heaven. Imagine that. Jesus reigns not as God, but as a human being. As *the* human being who absorbs all our sin and dysfunction into himself and overwhelms it in the Glory of God.

He who died and rose again defeated death and began to mend this world that is his by hauling it forward into the presence of God. He is the King of Heaven and he has called us to be kings and queens with him, to share in that reign.

But here's the problem.

Just where is heaven?

We are tempted to make heaven something private. Heaven is in our hearts (this mistake rests on a mistranslation Luke 17:21, where Jesus says, according to some translations “the kingdom is within you”). We moderns have taken that and run with it. The kingdom is a mystical reality inside of us.

But that's not what heaven is or where heaven is. The fullness of God's presence is something public. Something accessible. It's open now to all who believe. Jesus was crucified in public, not in the privacy of our hearts. Jesus was raised in public, with an empty tomb and a rolled stone bearing mute witness to the angel's words, He is not here. He is Risen. Jesus ascended into heaven in and as his body. It went, well, somewhere.

That somewhere is what we call heaven. And for us, it is a future reality, but not a private one. We long for its appearing even as we long for Christ's appearing. For when he appears, heaven—the fullness of God's presence--shall saturate the earth in a fully public fully accessible way. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. And in the end, all will be well.

Until that day of glory, heaven, Jesus's reign, is glimpsed. It's here in a flash. There in a flutter. It is an already, but not yet reality.

So where do we see Jesus's reign?

Jesus is King of the Church

We see it, or ought to see it, first of all in the Church. Listen to how St. John describes the church in our New Testament reading: “To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 1: 5-6).

God made us—his church—to be a kingdom. Kingdom here is not a spiritual word. It does not name a private social club—like the Rotary Club or the Lions' Club today. It does not name a private religion that leaves our public behaviour untouched.

There were lots of religions in the ancient world that had private ceremonies, but left people free to go through their day to day lives indistinguishable from the world around them. And had Christianity been one of those, there would have been no controversy or conflict with the political powers of the day and certainly no martyrs who suffered and died for Jesus's sake.

The first Christians were public in their commitment. In a day when a common greeting was Kaiser Kurios (Caesar is Lord), early Christians had their own: Iesus Kurios (Jesus is Lord). Jesus's Kingdom is on the one hand not of this world. But on the other, it pushes in on this world. If the Church is in some way God's kingdom and the Church is in this world, then the kingdom should be seen here. Jesus is the King of the Church.

So, where is the Church?

It's not as obvious a question as it first sounds. Especially in a city like ours. When Paul planted a church in the ancient world, there was one church. They may have met in several homes, as the Corinthians did, but they were one body, one community, and they were identifiable, if not always publicly because of fear of persecution, then certainly to each other. Here in Steinbach, we can't throw a rock without hitting a church. We are heavily church-ed and have multiple churches. How do these many bodies make up the Kingdom of God?

Here's the short answer. Doug touched on it in his temple talk last week. The church is that body of believers that fulfills this threefold mission in any given area: the worship of the God revealed in and by Jesus of Nazareth; a commitment to share the good news that Jesus reigns with everyone (evangelism); and care for those who are the last and least in the kingdom of the world (the poor). Worship. Evangelism. Care for the Poor. Where you have those three things, there you have the church.

Now, the temptation for us in churchy Steinbach, is going to be to ask if that church over there does a decent job of living out those criteria. Stop that! We have not been appointed to judge other communities. It is our task to judge ourselves. Do we worship in a way that announces that Jesus is King here? Do we evangelize in a way that makes it clear that Jesus is King here? Do we care for the poor in a way that makes it clear that Jesus is King here?

These questions are always and ongoing. They should be the questions that animate me as your pastor, that organize the work of parish Council, that inspire your own connection with this community. And if the answer, in your assessment, is, "St. Paul's fails at x," not only do you need to say so, you need to ask whether God is calling you to be a part of the corrective. You and your gifts have been given to this community so that we all can live into the threefold mission to which God has called us.

If Jesus is King here, then here is the Church. And if here is the Church, this should be a place where the kingship of Jesus is encountered. Perfectly? Hardly. But consistently? Yes. At least that is my prayer. And I hope it's yours, too.

Jesus is King of this world

Last, Jesus is King of this world. Listen again to our OT lesson: "To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an

everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:14)

This is perhaps the hardest part to grasp. Jesus is King of Heaven—ok. The Church? Yes, I get that. But this world? Jesus is King in Kyiv and Moscow? Jesus is King in Tel Aviv and Beirut? Jesus is King in Beijing and Washington and Ottawa? The answer is, yes.

And why don't we see it yet? **Where is his rule?**

Now that is a good question. It is the question that animates so much of the New Testament. I think we can even see it in developing in the mind of St. Paul. In his early work, say 1 Corinthians or 1 Thessalonians, it sounds like he expects Jesus to return within his lifetime. When he tells the Christians in Thessalonica that “the dead in Christ shall rise first and we who are alive and remain shall be caught up with them in the air,” he is straightforwardly talking about himself. He is part of the “we.”

He is more modest in later letters—letters even to these same churches. Inviting these churches to believe that there will be an indeterminate delay between his day and the end of days. Between—and here's the point—the inauguration of Jesus's reign and the appearing of the King.

Jesus entered into his reign on the Cross. There is the king. The prophecy of Daniel 7 was fulfilled when Jesus left us in a cloud of glory and entered into his Father's presence there to receive a kingdom that will never end. The King entered into his world. By his death and resurrection, he ended the usurping reign of sin, death and the devil. He ascended into heaven and from there gave his Spirit to empower his church, his collection of kings and priests, to point to his reign wherever we encounter it.

And we wait. And we long for the day of his appearing. And we ask with the Psalmist, How long O lord? And we pray with the early Church, Maranatha, Lord come quickly!